Evaluation of an 8 Week Group Treatment Programme Provided to Cannabis Dependent Individuals

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Introduction

Cannabis is by far the most widely used illicit drug in Ireland (NACD, 2011). Among recent cannabis users 9% were classified as cannabis dependent and 17% met criteria for cannabis abuse (NACD, 2013). Experience has demonstrated the difficulty to attract into and retain this group of drug users in treatment.

Aims

The aim of the treatment programme was to reduce participants dependence on cannabis. The objectives included

o   Retention of clients in treatment
o   Increasing motivation to change

Methodology

▪The programme was undertaken at a drug treatment service.
▪Twenty one individuals attended two separate treatment groups.
▪ Participants were recruited via self referral and agency referral.
▪The treatment intervention consisted of one assessment session followed by eight group sessions delivered weekly to individuals dependent on cannabis.
▪The content of the treatment programme was taken mainly from the manual MET & CBT for Adolescent Cannabis Users Vol 1 (Sampl & Kadden, 2001).
▪A 'Readiness to Change' questionnaire (NCPIC, 2009) and a 'Severity of Dependence' (SOD) questionnaire (Gossop et al., 1995) were completed with participants at assessment and with those who completed treatment.

Results

➤The attendance level was 62% .
➤Motivation to change use of cannabis was increased on completion of treatment as illustrated in Figure 1.
➤Participants scored their dependency greater on completion of treatment despite a self reported reduction in cannabis use as illustrated in Figure 2.
➤It was puzzling that participants scored their dependency greater at the end of treatment. They self reported using less cannabis. This explained by a self described change in how they perceived their dependency pre and post treatment

Figure 1 -Readiness to Change Pre & Post Treatment
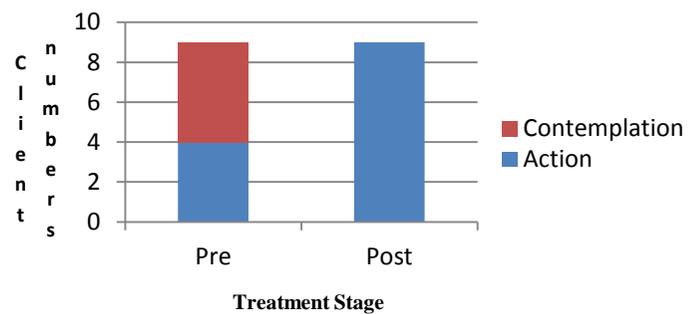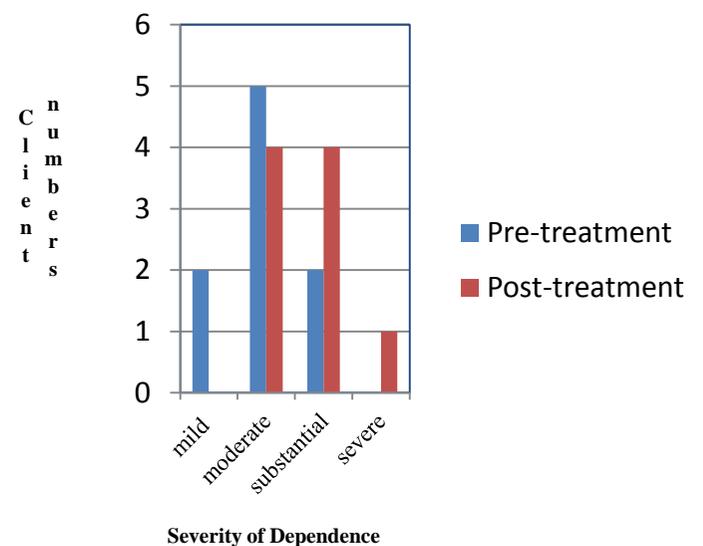

Figure 2 - Severity of Dependence Before & After Treatment

Participant Feedback

'This group has set the foundations to help me quit cannabis and without it I would never have tried giving up'

" I would highly recommend it to anyone considering giving up"

"Found an invaluable skill set from participants and leaders alike. I have changed my mentality on cannabis usage"

Conclusions

✓The treatment programme was an effective means of retaining clients in treatment and increasing motivation to reduce or stop cannabis use.
✓The increased awareness gained by engaging in the programme altered participants perception of their severity of dependence. Such that they acknowledged that their dependence was greater than they originally believed.